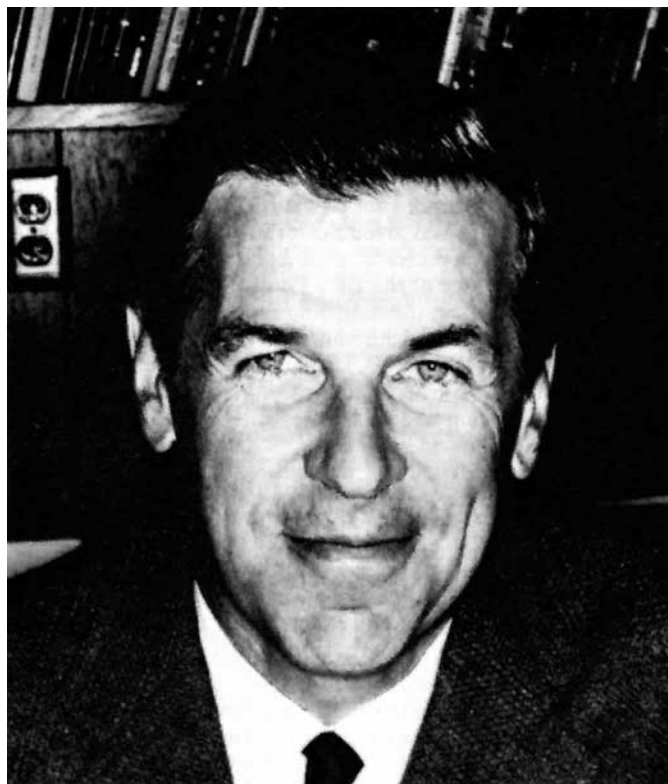


Stray Thoughts About the Editorship

Richard B. Stoughton, M.D. (1967–1972)



When offered the position of Editor of the Journal in 1967, I was forced to consider, for the first time in my life, what the qualifications and responsibilities might be. If there were any formal courses in “editorship,” I certainly had not been exposed to them, and, furthermore, I had no experience in an editorial office. However, I judged that most other editors of medical journals had inadequate qualifications similar to mine when they assumed their duties and somehow managed to get by, so I accepted.

The first thing that became apparent was that one must be humble and not behave as some of the old-time editors of medical journals who regarded themselves as warlords and omnipotent in their fiefs. Perhaps such behavior was proper and acceptable for an editor of the JAMA during the 1930s and ‘40s, but the explosion of information in medical biology during the 1960s intimidated any medical editor, who, in turn, had to search frantically for talented associate editors and reviewers to render proper scientific judgments on a wide range of research articles submitted for publication.

In the course of a year, when some 200 papers of the 400 received by us were published, there had to be at least 100 reviewers to determine carefully the merits of these manuscripts. Frequently reviewers were enlisted who were quite distant from the mainstream of clinical or investigative dermatology in order to find scientific expertise in ever-narrowing special subjects. Two reviewers of each paper were usually sufficient for the editor to make a decision, but a third or even a fourth reviewer was called upon for an occasional manuscript.

For the most part, this system seemed to be fair to the authors and readers of the Journal. In retrospect, with many years to assess the facts, it seems that we rejected only a few good papers and accepted few poor papers.

The reviewing system is the heart of the Journal, and anything that is done to bypass or ignore it can only lead to disaster.

In 1967 there was considerable advertising in *The Journal of Investigative Dermatology*, and it was an important source of support for the magazine, whose expenses certainly were not covered by the subscription fees. Sporadic complaints from readers were received about naked ladies portrayed in soap and cream advertisements, about deviations from the realities of science in others, about the whole concept of any advertising in a scientific journal, and about many other details. However, these were more petulant than demanding, and little was done to turn away this source of income.

Toward the end of my five years as Editor, advertising volume began to drop and not long after almost disappeared from the Journal. The main reason was that as the journal articles became more esoteric to the clinician, those who controlled the placement of advertising realized that, compared to the more clinically oriented journals, the prescriptions written by our readers were a small proportion of those written by dermatologists who read the clinical journals and “throw-away” periodicals. The lack of advertising revenue has recently stimulated a major effort to obtain an endowment to support publication costs of The Journal. Perhaps all scientific journals could hold their heads a bit higher if they were not dependent on advertising income.

The staff of the journal office up to 1967 consisted primarily of the Editor and some sporadic supporting help. The Board of Directors of the Society for Investigative Dermatology decided to allow a regular part-time salary (\$5,000 per year, as I remember) for an editorial assistant to do the secretarial work, proofreading, and managing of many of the affairs of the Journal. Those interviewed for such a job found that their high-school diplomas could fetch them more elsewhere, so I preyed upon a housewife with a Ph.D. in physiological psychology (and a compulsive interest in grammar) to accept the task. Since she had served so well in many of our joint projects in the past, I was delighted to receive Gwen Stoughton’s acceptance of the offer. She proved invaluable in this assignment and even seemed pleased to be making \$5,000 per year, which was more than her family duties had allowed her to earn in the past 15 years.

It seemed to me that the elapsed time from the receipt of a manuscript to the final distribution to readers had always been longer than it should be. We tried to improve this, but with little success. The reviewers frequently take two to four weeks to return the manuscript, and with two reviewers for each, it was usually a month to get the opinions back to the editorial office (although two reviewers would receive their copies simultaneously). Then the authors were almost always required to make revisions, and this usually required one to three months before we had the manuscript back in the editorial office. The next delay was in the publisher’s area where they took four to five months to get the manuscript into galley proofs, and a few weeks more were necessary to get these back from the authors. Another two to three months would find the final journal issue ready to send to subscribers.

During my editorship the meetings of The Society for Investigative Dermatology were all plenary sessions, with no grouping of topics according to subject. It was a transition period in which investigators in our field were becoming subspecialized and were beginning to sense that they were not able to remain entirely conversant with all other investigators in cutaneous biology. This grew more acute after 1972 and gradually required the formation of many sub-sessions during the annual meeting of the Society.

The crescendo of funding for research and training in cutaneous biology started in the mid ‘50s and rose very rapidly during the ‘60s, so

that the huge impact of these funds burst upon the shores of dermatology in the early '70s, requiring major changes in the organization of the national and regional meetings of investigative dermatology. These changes, of course, were also necessitated by the joining of European and Japanese investigative groups in the presentations of the Society. The work now presented by investigators in cutaneous biology is superior to many sub-specialties in medical biology and, as far as I can determine, second to none. Those of us who started in dermatology in the 1940s can appreciate fully the gargantuan progress that has uplifted our specialty from rather humble beginnings to elegant superiority. The JID has witnessed and revealed this fomentation of ideas in cutaneous biology and continues to be the major organ for their dissemination.

When I started as Editor in 1967, there had been no specific limit put on the tenure of the editors of the Journal. In the previous 30 years there had been only two editors for the Journal. It seemed to me that after two to three years in the job, one's enthusiasm tended to wane and ideas for managing the Journal were already in place. In my case, I had then no new revelations about changes that should be forthcoming. This meant a custodial position which a good editor should not accept or be

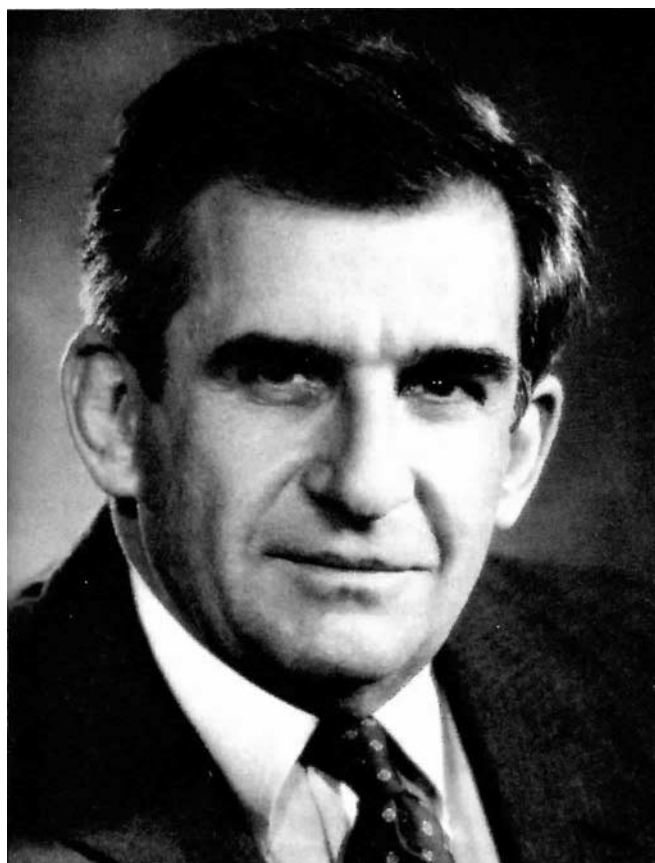
encouraged to continue. Also the long editorships that I had observed in other journals did not seem to me to have led to the best interests of their contributors or readers. The Board of Directors agreed to find a new editor at the end of my five years of service, and the five-year term for each editor has been in effect since then. There are many arguments to support both sides of the concept for a short- or long-time editorship, but I still think that a limit of five years for the editorial office is a good rule to follow.

All humans maintain a strong faith in something, be it craftsmanship, art, formal religion, agnosticism, mysticism, astrology or other 'ships or 'isms, but the true faith of the scientist is in truth as it is revealed by scientific methods. Honesty, logic, intellectual challenge of ideas, repeatable methods, rational conclusions, reproducibility of initial observations, predictions from past experiments that turn future chaos into well-ordered expectations are a few of the aspects of the scientific method.

It is a faith and must be protected from illogic, charlatans, dishonesty, and other common ills of mankind if true progress is to be made in unraveling the monstrous voids of the unknown. A scientific editor worthy of the name must hold fast and act in the faith of these beliefs.

A Journal for Two Societies: SID and ESDR

Irwin M. Freedberg, M.D. (1972–1977)



*These are the days when birds come back,
A very few, a bird or two,
To take a backward look.*

Emily Dickinson

One of the most important choices made by others regarding my professional career was the decision made by the members of the committee charged with the responsibility of identifying a new Editor of *The Journal of Investigative Dermatology* to succeed Richard Stoughton. At the time it was made, it probably was the most important. I am certain their decision influenced three subsequent committees whose conclusions may have been very different if I had not been offered the opportunity to serve as the fourth Editor of our Journal. The three decisions which followed were made by a professorial tenure committee at Harvard and by search committees at Johns Hopkins and New York University. My service as JID Editor was really the first major opportunity in which I had to prove my abilities on more than a local level—without that first opportunity, the others may not have followed. I shall always be grateful to those who made the choice in 1971.

When the Journal files arrived in Boston from San Diego at the end of June, 1972, they were in very different condition than the files which recently have moved from Boston to Denver (after an intervening sojourn in Chicago). At that time, they were close to empty of acceptable, unpublished manuscripts and, as a consequence, we published some very thin issues during our first year of responsibility. The *we* is not an editorial "*we*" but a realistic "*we*," for I shared the responsibility for the Journal during my entire tenure. The Editorial Board and reviewers were extremely helpful, but the largest burden was borne by Pat Novak, a unique, dedicated, talented editor who recently completed her second term in the JID office. Pat served as Editorial Associate during Howard Baden's tenure as well.

Pat and I realized quickly that we could not survive if we were to publish just a front cover and a back cover with nothing between them.